

RELEASED IN PART B6

ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 EEB-00 AF-00 VCI-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 WHA-00
 PDI-00 DS-00 EAP-00 AVC-00 UTE-00 TEDE-00 INR-00
 IO-00 L-00 MOFM-00 MOF-00 VCIE-00 NEA-00 NSAE-00
 ISN-00 NSCE-00 OES-00 OIC-00 OIG-00 OMB-00 PA-00
 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 ISNE-00 SP-00 SSO-00 SS-00
 TRSE-00 T-00 BBG-00 IIP-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-00
 G-00 SCA-00 CARC-00 SAS-00 SRMC-00 /000W
 -----4124C1 080101Z /23

R 071305Z MAR 11
 FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2106
 INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
 MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
 NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
 HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
 AMEMBASSY BEIJING
 AMEMBASSY CARACAS
 AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
 AMEMBASSY RANGOON
 AMEMBASSY HANOI
 AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
 AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
 AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
 AMEMBASSY HARARE
 SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
 JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS BELGRADE 000218

SENSITIVE

E.O. 13526: N/A
 TAGS: PGOV, PREL, KDEM, SR, EG, TS, LY, MV, BO, GG, ZI
 SUBJECT: Serbian NGO Exports Nonviolent Revolution Know-How

Summary

 1. (U) In order to transfer their expertise in non-violent struggle against authoritarian regimes to activists around the world, senior leaders of Otpor, the Serbian pro-democracy movement that played a significant role in overthrowing strongman Slobodan Milosevic, established the Center for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS) in 2004. CANVAS is an independent, Belgrade-based non-governmental organization with only a few full-time staff and a dozen international trainers; it has developed a comprehensive curriculum and provided training to over 2000 activists from almost 60 countries. CANVAS's first engagement was in Belarus, followed by trainings and workshops for activists from Georgia, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Venezuela, Burma, the Maldives, Egypt, and many other countries. Despite the obstacles to its work and the criticism its personnel sometimes face for being "commercial mercenaries," CANVAS continues to transfer know-how in non-violent struggle to interested pro-democracy groups

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Homme, Senior Reviewer

and also to provide academic programs to students in democratic countries. End summary.
Historical Overview

2. (U) Many nonviolent protests and some successful revolutions against repressive regimes throughout the world in the last decade have been inspired by the October 2000 "Bulldozer" revolution in Serbia that ousted dictator Slobodan Milosevic. A major role in that peaceful revolution was played by a group of young people who in 1998 organized themselves into a pro-democratic people's movement called "Otpor" ("Resistance"). After achieving their main goal of toppling the undemocratic regime, senior Otpor leaders could not agree on the proper post-revolution role for their organization. Some of them decided to transform Otpor into a political party, which was soundly defeated in the 2003 parliamentary elections and led to Otpor's disappearance. A handful of them, however, decided to share their expertise with others around the world fighting authoritarian regimes. Srdja Popovic and Sloba Djinovic, a politician and a businessman, began by organizing several workshops and trainings in Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Zimbabwe in 2002 and 2003. Inspired by the American academic Gene Sharp and his 1993 book "From Dictatorship to Democracy," they decided to formalize their activities and founded the Center for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS) in January 2004.

What is CANVAS?

3. (U) CANVAS is a non-profit, non-governmental international network oriented toward educational work related to strategic nonviolent conflict. They describe their mission as an "endeavor to reach the widest possible international audience, in order to share experiences, learn more about strategic nonviolent conflict, and examine related knowledge transfer methods." CANVAS relies completely on private and non-governmental funding, including from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED); they do not charge participants in their workshops and trainings, and their instructional materials can be downloaded for free on the Internet. The leaders of CANVAS tell us that it cooperates closely with a number of international organizations, including Freedom House, the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP). Instead of following the "classical approach" to democratization of strengthening civil society and institutions, CANVAS draws on the Serbian experience to give pro-democracy activists effective tools to place non-violent pressure on intransigent leaders. They encourage resistance movements to adopt a single symbol - often the clenched fist - to show their unity.

4. (SBU) CANVAS has a small office in New Belgrade staffed with four full-time administrative employees. Half of the operational expenses are paid by Djinovic, from his successful internet business, while other half is provided by private donors. The international network of trainers and consultants consists of eleven experts: six Serbs (including Popovic and Djinovic), two Georgians, and one each from South Africa, the Philippines and Lebanon. All are veterans of nonviolent struggle with successful professional or academic careers, who work with CANVAS on an as-needed basis.

Scope of Activities

5. (SBU) From 2002-2010, CANVAS organized or participated in 123 workshops or conferences with more than 2000 participants from 59 different countries, aimed at empowering nonviolent movements and helping international organizations to act more efficiently. With its partners, CANVAS has developed a core curriculum, published two books ("A Guide to Effective Nonviolent Struggle" and "Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points"), and created a video game, movies, and DVDs. The handbook for activists is available in six languages, including Farsi and Arabic, for free download from the organization's web site (<<http://www.canvasopedia.org>> www.canvasopedia.org). Popovic and Djinnovic periodically give three-week courses at universities in the United States. In January 2008, CANVAS started a joint graduate program at Belgrade University's Faculty of Political Science, which tells us is the first course dedicated to Strategic Nonviolent Struggle (SNVS). In 2011 CANVAS plans to begin offering an MA program of Political Analysis and Management at the Faculty of Political Science.

Alumni of CANVAS Training

6. (SBU) Despite its non-profit status, CANVAS has faced criticism for allegedly "commercializing" nonviolent movements and is frequently labeled a troublemaker or an "agent of Washington" by dictators. Serbian Foreign Minister Jeremic - a former Otpor activist himself - has even criticized the group for undermining Serbia's foreign policy (i.e. his efforts to retain support for Serbia's Kosovo policy among the Non-Aligned Movement and with rogue governments such as Iran). Despite its many critics, CANVAS has managed to work with activists from an impressive list of countries. Out of the 59 countries CANVAS has focused on, Popovic assesses only a few as "temporary failures." Belarus (2002) and Zimbabwe (2003) have been their biggest disappointments to date. Popovic attributes the lack of democratic changes in both countries to highly splintered opposition movements and corrupt, compromised civil society. However, CANVAS still works with activists from these countries in 'offshore' trainings in Lithuania and South Africa. In Bolivia, CANVAS participated in successful preparation of the 2008 GOTV referendum campaign, and trained opposition groups from Santa Cruz for the 2009 Venezuelan parliamentary elections. President Hugo Chavez publicly condemned 'Otpor' as "the main troublemakers in Venezuela." In Asia, CANVAS organized trainings for activists from Burma, Vietnam and Tibet, while there are ongoing consultations with pro-democracy groups from Syria and Iran.

7. (SBU) The list of CANVAS's success stories is much longer. In 2002, Djinnovic, Popovic and other Otpor veterans began training activists of Georgia's "Kmara" movement. Kmara then went on to lead the movement that peacefully forced President Sheverdnadze to resign in 2003, in what became known as the Rose Revolution. Following Georgia, CANVAS provided training to the "Pora" movement in the Ukraine, which became a leading engine of the Orange Revolution that overthrew autocrat Leonid Kuchma. Djinnovic is exceptionally proud of the success of nonviolent struggle in

B6

Lebanon, where he trained several groups that participated in the 2004 Cedar Revolution, launching a sit-in by a million people after the assassination of PM Hariri and driving Syrian troops from Lebanon after 35 years of conflict.

8. (SBU) The demonstrations leading up to the January 25 ouster of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak attracted significant international media attention to CANVAS's role after the distinctive Otpor symbol of the clenched fist appeared among protestors on Cairo's Tahrir Square. Popovic gave several interviews to western media, including the New York Times and Foreign Policy Magazine, explaining how his organization in 2009 provided lessons in peaceful protest to members of the "April 6" and "Kefaya" youth movements. [REDACTED] told us that CANVAS had not trained any of the groups or individuals involved in the demonstrations in Tunisia or Libya, and that CANVAS as a matter of policy did not respond to inquiries from groups with an Islamist agenda.

B6

Democracy Island - Maldives Case Study

9. (SBU) In 2006 and 2007, CANVAS provided extensive training in political and election strategy to activists of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDA) and its leader Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed. After three years of nonviolent agitation and international pressure, longtime Maldives strongman President Gayoom finally called country's first multiparty democratic elections in October 2008 and was defeated by the MDA. The young and energetic Nasheed, a former political prisoner, became the first democratically-elected president of this tiny, tourism-dependent, Muslim country. In gratitude for the assistance from CANVAS that contributed to his victory, Nasheed agreed to help bring to life Popovic's idea for an academic institution where local and foreign scholars, activists and politicians could learn nonviolent struggle methods. He gave CANVAS a small island, christened Democracy Island, where the NGO hopes to build a campus.

Comment

10. (SBU) While no single NGO could play a decisive role in nonviolent regime change, it appears that CANVAS has had exceptional influence over the key players in a number of peaceful revolutions over the past several years. The group appears to be playing a unique role in spreading concrete tactics for nonviolent resistance to dynamic youth groups around the world, while insulating itself from its critics through careful selection of students and smart (i.e. private) financing. We imagine that authoritarian regimes now take notice when the distinctive Otpor clenched fist symbol appears on their streets. End comment.

Biographies

11. (U) Srdja Popovic was born in 1973 in Belgrade, Serbia, and graduated from the University of Belgrade with a degree in maritime biology, animal ecology, and fisheries. A student leader since 1992 and a co-founder of the Otpor youth movement, Popovic was Executive Director of Otpor's "Gotov je" (He's Finished) national campaign in Serbia in 2000. Popovic has been a prominent member of the Democratic Party (DS) since its establishment; he was president

of the DS Youth from 1994-1996, a member of the National Assembly, and a special advisor to Prime Minister Djindjic from 2000 to 2003. Since founding CANVAS in 2004 he has worked as the director, consultant and trainer. He also founded the Ecotopia environmental protection fund in 2009. Popovic served as an advisor for environmental protection to Deputy Prime Minister Bozidar Djelic from 2008 to 2010. He is a lecturer on nonviolent social change at Belgrade University's Faculty of Political Science and a visiting lecturer at Colorado College, U.S. Air Force Academy, Tuft's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Grinnell College, and Rutgers University.

12. (U) Slobodan "Sloba" DjinoVIC was born in 1975 in Belgrade, Serbia. He received a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Belgrade and holds an MA from Tuft's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He became a student leader in 1994 and in 1998 co-founded the Otpor movement. DjinoVIC is an expert in IT and telecommunications technology. In 2000 his private company Media Works established the first WiFi network in Belgrade and Serbia. Since 2002 he has provided strategic nonviolence training for democracy movements and peaceful opposition groups around the world. In 2004 he cofounded CANVAS and become its chairman. He was a contractor and adviser in a number of USAID projects in Serbia. DjinoVIC owns Serbia's second largest landline telephone and internet provider, Orion Telecom, which employs 320 people. With Popovic he is also a lecturer on nonviolent social change Belgrade University's Faculty of Political Science, and a visiting lecturer at Colorado College, the U.S. Air Force Academy, Tuft's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Grinnell College, and Rutgers University.

WARLICK

NNNN